LONDON AS IT WAS, AND AS IT IS IN 1844.

(*Continued from p. 473.*)

In early times Westminster, now the seat of Government, of legislature, and of health, was formerly a mean, wretched place, remarkably unhealthy on account of being a marshy island, surmounted on the one side by the Thames, and on others by what is called Long Ditch, a branch of the river which began near the east end of the place where Manchester-court is now situated, intersected King-street, and running along Gardeners-lane to Long Ditch, crossed Tothill-street, a little to the west of the Gate-house, and continued its course along the south wall of the abbey garden, where a common sewer was erected over it. The island thus formed was in a manner a waste, overgrown with briars and thorns, and was thence called Thorny Island. In this situation was the abbey church founded, and it continued thus for ages a place entirely distinct from London, there being a large space between them. The Strand was the road that led from London to that town, and it was open on either side to the Thames and to the fields. In 1385 this road was first paved as far as the Savoy; and many years afterwards Sir Robert Cecil, building a house at Ivy-bridge, his interest brought the pavement of the road to be extended thither, and many of the houses of the nobility were erected in the Strand.

Westminster owed many of its most distinguished privileges to Henry VIII., for when the abbey was in 1541 converted into a cathedral, he appointed the whole county of Middlesex, except Fulham, as its diocese. Upon this occasion Westminster became a city; it had many years before been the seat of the royal palace, the high court of Parliament, and of our law tribunals. The first important improvement was inclosing St. James's Park, which was at that time a wild wet field, it was then drained and partially planted. From that time Westminster began to extend on every side, though it did not long enjoy the honour of being a city, and even the palace was some time after burnt, for it never had more than one bishop, and he being in 1550 translated by Edward VI. to the see of Norwich, the new bishoprick was dissolved by that prince; and its right to the epithet of city was thereby lost, though by public complaisance it has retained that name ever since; but yet Westminster had not any arms till the year 1601.

The city of Westminster at present consists of two parishes, those of St. Margaret and St. John the Evangelist; but its liberties contain seven parishes, viz. St. Martin's, St. James's, St. Paul's Covent Garden, St. Mary le Strand, St. Clement's Danes, and St. George's, Hanover-square, and the precinct about where the Savoy formerly stood.

The first stone of Westminster-bridge was laid in January 1738, by the Earl of Pembroke, the last stone was laid in 1747.

The most probable account given of the origin of the abbey church of St. Peter, Westminster, is that Sebert, king of the East Saxons, who died in 616, having been converted to Christianity by Austin's discourses and his uncle Ethelbert's example, erected this church on the ruins of a temple dedicated to Apollo, and caused Mellitus, Bishop of London, to consecrate it to St. Peter.

This church and monastery were afterwards repaired and enlarged by Offa, King of Mercia, but being destroyed by the Danes, they were rebuilt by King Edgar, who endowed them with lands and manors, and in the year 969 granted them many ample privileges. Having once more suffered from the ravages of the Danes, they were again rebuilt by Edward the Confessor, who pulling down the old church, built for that age a magnificent one in the form of a cross, which afterwards became a pattern for that kind of building. In 1065 it was consecrated with great pomp, confirmed in its ancient rights and privileges, and endowed with many rich manors and additional immunities. He also gave the church and convent a charter of sanctuary, in which he declares, that any person whatsoever, let his crimes be ever so great, who takes sanctuary in that holy place, shall be assured of life, liberty, and limb, and that none of his ministers, nor those of his successors, should seize any of his goods, lands, or possessions, under pain of everlasting damnation, and that whoever presumed to act contrary to this grant, should lose his name, worship, dignity, and power, and, with the traitor Judas, be in the everlasting fire of hell.

William the Conqueror, to shew his regard to the memory of his friend King Edward, repaired the church, and offered a sumptuous pall as a covering for his tomb; he also gave fifty marks of silver, a rich altar-cloth, and two caskets of gold; and the following year was crowned there, being the first coronation performed in that place.

Henry III. improved the church by erecting a new chapel to the blessed Virgin, but afterwards finding the walls and steeple of the old structure much decayed, he pulled them down with the design of rebuilding them, but he did not live to accomplish the work. In 1502, King Henry VII. began that magnificent structure now generally called by his name; for this purpose he destroyed the chapel of Henry III. and an adjoining house, called White Rose Tavern. This chapel was also dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and he, designing it for a burial-place for himself and his posterity, commanded in his will that none but those of blood royal should be buried there.

Before the suppression of religious houses, the abbey was surrendered to Henry VIII. by William Benson, the then abbot, and seventeen of the monks, when its revenues amounted to 3,997*l.* 6*s.* 4*d.* Besides its inestimable furniture, it had no less than 216 manors, 17 hamlets, and 97 towns and villages in different parts of the kingdom. After this the abbey underwent several changes until Queen Elizabeth, after ejecting the monks established therein by her predecessor, erected Westminster Abbey into a college, under the government of a dean and twelve secular canons or prebendaries, a schoolmaster, usher, and forty scholars, denominated the Queen's, to be educated in the liberal sciences preparatory to the university, and to have all the necessaries of life except clothing, of which they were only to have a gown every year.

The Almony receives its name from the alms of the abbey being distributed there, and was originally a chapel dedicated to St. Catharine. Near this chapel Abbot Islip erected the first printing-house that ever was in England in 1474, when William Caxton, citizen and mercer of London, brought that invaluable art from Holland. Its introduction into this country was the commencement of a new era, its first fruits the seeds of a great moral and social revolution, which before 1944 will have extended and brought forth its fruits in the most remote regions of the earth. The works issued from the Caxton press are eagerly sought for by scholastic antiquarians.

St. Margaret's Church was built by Edward the Confessor for the common services of religion. It was rebuilt in the reign of King Edward I., by the parishioners and merchants of the staple, except the chancel, which was erected at the expense of the Abbot of Westminster. In 1735 it was repaired, and the tower cased and mostly rebuilt at an expense of 3,500*l.* granted by Parliament. In 1758 it again underwent repair, with considerable damage to its taste. The patronage of the living is in the dean and chapter of Westminster.

A clever writer in 1735 observes, "The great men at the court end of the town are particularly distinguished by refusing to do any thing to serve others, and by a great number of tall powdered animals with two legs, who walk before a chair, or hang like a cluster of bees at the hind part of the chariot, embracing each other in an unseemly posture. For the benefit of this part of the metropolis, which includes the *beau monde*, the king has given the liberty to all idle people of walking in St. James's Park. Here is the Mall, famous for being the rendezvous of the gay and gallant, who assemble there to see and be seen, to censure and be censured; the ladies to shew their fine clothes, and the product of the toilet, the men to shew their toupées, observe all the beauties, and fix on some favourite to toast that evening at the tavern. I once happened to fall into a file of very fine fellows in this place, and remember, when we began our march, we ranked one French suit, though somewhat sullied, three pairs of clock stockings, one suit of Paduasoy, two embroidered waistcoats, the one a little tarnished, and two pair of silver breeches. We made a most formidable show, carrying the whole breadth of the Mall, and sweeping all before us; we thought ourselves at least capable to act upon the defensive; but by that we had got opposite to Godolphin House, we were convinced of our error, for here a puppy in a French suit pulling out a most extravagantly rich snuff-box, no less than three deserted, and went at once over to the enemy. As one misfortune seldom comes alone, a monstrous gold headed cane in the hands of a gamester, deprived us of two more of our company. So that all on a sudden our corps was dwindled away like a South Sea project, and began to look as thin as a House of Parliament at a 30th January sermon, or an independent company of foot. In this plight the remains of us stood staring up at each other as stupidly as the country people do when they go to view the royal apartments at Hampton Court or Windsor, as not knowing whether to advance or retreat. Fortunately for us, in this dilemma we enlisted one of the most beautiful sword knots that ever came into the kingdom; we could perceive recruits coming in from every quarter, and in less than seven minutes got ourselves into *statu quo*. Several revolutions of this kind happened to us in the space of about two hours, till at last I was left only with a little strutting fellow, who calls himself secretary to a foreign minister, and I got rid of him by fixing his eye upon a periwig that appeared to be made about a month later than mine was."

The Mall was long the favourite resort of loungers, the chosen spot on which to make an acquaintance, to form an intrigue, or to pick up a flat. The love of outward display was prevalent in the eighteenth century, and crowds of belles and beaux were to be met with in this walk, rivalling each other in pomp and ornament of dress, many of whom, like snails, carried all their earthly possessions on their backs. Here the ladie's-maid was often mistaken for her ladyship, the valet was seen sporting the wig, sword, and ruffles of his master. Bullies, sharpers, peers, poets, dames d'honneur, courtezans, and a motley crowd of town and country idlers were seen bravely dressed, according to the quaint fashions of the day, and rivalling each other in the ridiculous display of swords, sword-knots, toupées, bag-wigs, embroidered waistcoats, brocades, paints, and patches; laughing, talking, quarrelling or intriguing, and sometimes fighting, for the English at that period were much addicted to this elegant amusement. Combats, says Ali Mohammed Hadji, are very common among the lower orders, the assailants fighting like rams, running head foremost, and butting each other; these exercises were in great esteem, and diverting both men and women. In the evening of their sabbaths and festivities, it was common to see the streets filled with these sorts of encounters: all kinds of servants being at liberty, and generally well loaded with liquors, have frequent quarrels and bickerings about precedency. Mothers encouraged their sons, and married women their husbands to engage, the latter holding their husbands' canes and children the meanwhile. And some people of quality lay aside their wigs, swords, and neckcloths to box, when they are insulted by mean persons, against whom they must not draw their swords, this being esteemed the most rascally thing a gentleman could be guilty of; for which reason persons of high rank might often be seen with swoln faces and black eyes.

The Mall was often resorted to as a finish to some Bacchanalian feast, or early in the morning, as a consequence of that feast, in order to discuss some frivolous question at the point of the sword, and duels were very frequent near Marlborough House. It was also resorted to by hungry expectants, as it is even to the present day, who, should no fortunate chance turn up, are fain to dine with that cold-blooded sprig of nobility, Duke Humphrey.

The Park is now filled with trees, shrubs, flowers, swans, and Muscovy ducks, but its aristocratic days have departed, few visit its elegant inclosure but holiday folks, unfashionable idlers, sentimental lovers, disappointed belles, and beaux. An occasional *spectacle* is seen on the opening or closing of Parliament, and the daily parade of the Guards; but St. James's Park is now decidedly unfashionable.

In this age of improvement and extension of the greatest and wealthiest metropolis in the world, with such houses as the new buildings